

THE REALITY OF HAPPINESS

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Abstract

Happiness is one of the subjects of Positive psychology, a new field of study in which emphasis is placed upon three factors, viz (i) well-being, (ii) positivity, and (iii) happiness. It is generally agreed that happiness is a state of mind, a feeling of contentment, fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy. There are two aspects of happiness, (i) how a person feels in the present moment, and (ii) how a person feels about his overall life. A brief study of various aspects of happiness have been discussed in this paper to help people to find out how to be happy in life.

Keywords – Happiness, Belief, Psychology, Philosophy, Islam

A brief history

Happiness is a broad-based term. Philosophers, Psychologists, social scientists, and theologians have attempted to define happiness and have come up with various definitions.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) said, 'happiness is a state of activity'. Meaning, happy people do not sit idle at home. They thrive and pursue their goals with passion and their activities do not tire them. He said, eudaimonia is the goal of human thought and action, and it is an activity, rather than an emotion or state. Aristotle used the term 'eudaimonia' which broadly means 'happiness and flourishing' in 'Nicomachean Ethics' which he wrote in Greek in 350 BCE.

As per Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), making 'happiness' an ultimate goal in life, makes a person selfish and disgraceful. In trying to seek individual happiness, people focus only on their pleasure and health, irrespective of what happens in the society. He advocated a broad-based culture in society in which higher goals of prosperity and wellbeing of all individuals are set, rather than mere individual happiness. Nietzsche

advocated a culture where the value of human suffering is assessed in order to create a better value of human life for every member of the society.

Aristippus of Cyrene (435-356 BCE) was a Hedonistic Greek philosopher and founder of Cyrenaic school of philosophy. He was a student of Socrates (470-399 BCE). He suggested Hedonism, meaning 'pleasure', to be an activity to seek happiness. As per Aristippus, hedonism is a mix of several philosophical theories which emphasizes that 'pleasure' plays a central role in human activity in seeking happiness. There are two types of Hedonistic pleasures, namely, (i) psychological or motivational, and (ii) normative or ethical. Motivational or psychological Hedonism is determined by desires, to increase pleasure and decrease pain. Ethical or normative Hedonism is how we need to act ethically to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Psychological or motivational hedonism can lead to pursuit of momentary gratification in sensory pleasures without regard to consequences. While ethical Hedonism keeps a tab on rationalizing animalistic and selfish desires which are harmful for human society.

When we rationalize the philosophical theories of Aristotle, Aristippus and Nietzsche, we come to the following two aspects with which happiness can be derived.

(i) Hedonistic happiness, which is derived from pleasure, doing what makes you happy, self-caring, fulfilling desires with a sense of satisfaction in an ethical way.

(ii) Eudemonistic happiness, which is derived from seeking virtue and meaning in life. It is a feeling of finding a meaning, value, and purpose of life, which is associated with taking care of

responsibilities, concern for the society, and living with humanistic ideals in pursuing long term goals.

Modern day psychologists and social scientists suggest that Hedonia and Eudemonia meaning 'pleasure' and 'meaning', are two components of happiness. Recently, they have added a third component of happiness which is known as 'engagement' which means commitment and participation in various activities of life.

The relative importance of above aspects of happiness varies from person to person. For certain individuals some activities may be pleasurable and meaningful both, but for others these may vary in one way or another. Like working for a cause may not be as pleasurable as it is meaningful.

Types of happiness

(i) Momentary happiness

We feel joy of certain things in our daily lives. It is important that we prolong these feelings. Sometimes we feel excited about certain things which adds to happiness. We should make sure that this feeling becomes a precursor for anticipating positive outcomes of our actions in the following days and weeks. Cultivating positive emotions of gratitude is important to feel happy. We should not just feel thankful, rather learn to appreciate it. It is also important to celebrate success in life on things you have already accomplished. Remembrance of events on certain days of the year, like birthdays, graduation day, marriage day, the day when we acquired your coveted job, etc., and to celebrate them, provides a lot of happiness. Taking some time off every week from the routine and taking regular vacations also adds to happiness. We need to develop a feeling of optimism as it helps in living a happy and upbeat life. Developing the feeling of satisfaction also adds to happiness.

People tend to pay more attention to bad things in life than to good things which creates an impact on their decision-making process. It is important that we learn to discount bad things in comparison with good things in life and avoid

falling victim to pessimistic outlook. It is also important that we reframe our thoughts in a positive way. It does not mean that we ignore bad things and failures, rather it means that we are not allowing ourselves to become a victim of upsets in life and use them as steppingstone for success.

Some people are trapped into earning more and more wealth in order to be happy. They think that wealth brings happiness. They become so focused on their earnings that they lose track of enjoying what they have already earned. To avoid this trap, one must develop a sense of gratitude in what they have already achieved and make it a motivating factor in achieving new goals they have set for themselves.

(ii) Long term happiness

Research studies have shown that to involve in an activity you are passionate about, adds to long term happiness. Think of what excites you and engage in such activities regularly. This may include doing something as a stimulating past time, like cooking, playing musical instruments, learning new languages, tending garden, engaging in social and community causes, etc.

Those who are generally happy in life also go through whole range of human emotions like anger, frustration, boredom, loneliness, sorrow, etc., but they remain happy because they develop the trait of optimism and are hopeful that things will become better by the passage of time and that what is presently happening is under their control. For them, happiness is more of experiencing positive emotions rather than negative.

Happiness in the meaning of wellbeing is dependent upon, (i) positive management of emotions, (ii) feeling satisfied in life, (iii) realizing that the conditions in your life are better than many others in society, and (iv) you have already accomplished many things in life and will accomplish others as well by the passage of time.

(iii) Intrinsic and extrinsic happiness

It is important to cultivate a few traits in your behavior to feel happy every day, like, pursuing intrinsic goals. Research suggested that those who focus on intrinsic goals are happier than those who pursue extrinsic goals.

Intrinsic goals are, to seek things which are personally meaningful, which are your core needs and desires. These goals include competence, autonomy, relationships, personal growth, physical health and positive contribution to family and society. Intrinsic goals are those in which you enjoy doing them, and are motivated to do more, rather than waiting for their positive results.

Extrinsic goals are those in which you try to achieve something outside your own self. These include, improving your image in society, becoming famous, seeking power, making a lot of money, property, and huge investment portfolios, etc. Pursuit of fame, power, and money brings with it a lot of worries and frustrations. Therefore, it is important to balance our intrinsic and extrinsic goals for leading a happy life.

Whatever you do, there is an underlying reason, an intention or motivation in doing it. Your intention makes an action intrinsic or extrinsic. Like, doing an exercise as a showoff in society, is an extrinsic action. Doing exercise to take care of your health and feel happy is an intrinsic action. Similarly, studying hard to get good grades as a showoff to peers is extrinsic. Studying the subject to know more because the topic excites you, is intrinsic. Getting a job promotion to grow up on ladder and make more money or have a large team working under you, is extrinsic. Getting a job promotion to make more money to help others and help the company is intrinsic.

Concept of happiness in Islam

Islamic concept of happiness is different from the concept of happiness of philosophers, psychologists, and social scientists in the sense that life after death is part of the belief in Islam. What Islam teaches is, a complete package of happiness of mind, body, and soul in this world and the world in Hereafter.

The word used for happiness in the Quran is 'Sa'adah' (سعادة). The Quran says, '(on the day of judgment), some people will be wretched, and others will be blessed (happy). (11-105).' And 'those who are blessed will be in Paradise, where they will dwell so long as heaven and earth survive.' (11-108)

Since the philosophers, social scientists and most of the psychologists do not believe in God or resurrection of human beings, they get confused when they are told about the happiness of the world after death. Aristotle was confused about the idea of life after death or happiness in the life after death. He argued that since happiness is associated with exercising skills and carrying out tasks in an uninterrupted manner throughout the life, therefore, how come a lifeless body after death, could be happy (Nicomachean Ethics, book I). He made fun of 'life after death' by saying 'idle hands make devils work,' therefore an idle and lifeless body surely cannot be happy. Similar is the case of most of the philosophers who battle to understand the 'life after death' as they lack the Islamic certainty in Hereafter.

Muslim theologians interpret the Day of Resurrection (يوم القيامة) as the Day of Happiness (يوم السعادة) because they believe in eternal happiness in Paradise. This is the reason, the date of death of Awliya Allah are celebrated by Muslims as Urs every year on the date of their death.

Our life on earth is referred to in Islamic literature as Ad-Dunya (الدنيا) which literally means 'lower world.' The Quran refers it as Al-Hayat Ad-Dunya (الحياة الدنيا) which literally means 'the lower life'. The Quran says '(Some among you) desire the materials of this world, but Allah desires (for you) the (the eternal happiness of) Hereafter.' (8-67).

In Islam, the life of this world is to be treated as transient and the real life is the life of Hereafter. This life is like a farm where we sow the seeds of virtue to harvest them in the life of Hereafter.

The Quran says, 'Eat from the provision of your Lord, and be grateful to Him.' (34-15). And 'Seek the abode of the Hereafter (Paradise) through charity from what Allah has given you but forget

not your share in this world. Do good to others as Allah has done good to you, and do not try to spread corruption in the land. Surely Allah does not like corrupt people.' (28-77).

Muslim Theologian, Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), wrote a book titled 'the Alchemy of Happiness' in which he described that the real happiness in this world and in Hereafter is dependent upon observing the requirements of the tenets of Islam while maintaining self-discipline and asceticism. If the provisions of this world are used as per the teachings of Islam, they become the sources of happiness in this world and in Hereafter.

Conclusion

We have described in this paper happiness as understood by philosophers, psychologists, and social scientist. Different types of happiness have also been identified. In the end we provided the Islamic concept of eternal happiness. In conclusion, it can be described that the real happiness is the eternal happiness about which the Quran provides a comprehensive outline.

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About the Author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian, and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history, and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.